

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Chrysler Building

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

405 Lexington Avenue

— NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

New York

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

18th

STATE

New York

— VICINITY OF

CODE

COUNTY

New York

CODE

3 CLASSIFICATION

1

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art

STREET & NUMBER

4th Avenue & E. 7th Street

CITY, TOWN

New York

STATE

New York 10007

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTIONCOURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

New York County Hall of Records

STREET & NUMBER

31 Chambers Street

CITY, TOWN

New York

STATE

New York

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

DATE

— FEDERAL — STATE — COUNTY — LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

☒ EXCELLENT
☐ GOOD
☐ FAIR

☐ DETERIORATED
☐ RUINS
☐ UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

☒ UNALTERED
☐ ALTERED

CHECK ONE

☒ ORIGINAL SITE
☐ MOVED DATE 1976

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

A description of the building by the architect himself is complete:

"Mr. Walter P. Chrysler in comment on the reasons for the construction of the building which bears his name states, 'the Chrysler Building is dedicated to world commerce and industry.' The creation of this remarkable building required imagination and the origin of the idea lay in this broad conception. The development of the idea in tangible form has given New York City a most spectacular monument. Seen from many viewpoints for miles around by night or day, the Chrysler Building stands out among its fellows a towering and glittering shaft. Rising above the street higher than any other structure ever built, that alone creates interest and wonder. It is 1046 feet, 4-3/4 inches from the street level to the top of the pinnacle. The stories of the building number 77.

"The exterior is a design of contrast. Its surfaces are of enameled grey, white and black brick with trim of white Georgia marble and black Shastone granite. Coupled with these materials is an innovation in metal work. Practically all of the exposed metal window frames, copings, flashings, the finial and tower decorations are of 'Nirosta' steel, a newly developed rust resisting non-corrosive alloy. Aluminum is used for window sills and spandrels. Ornament in metal is developed from features of automobile construction. Gargoyles are reminiscent of ornamental radiator caps. Decorative bosses are derived from hub cap design. The top of the tower, rising in a series of arches, has spoke-like radials. Modernism is certainly predominate in the design.

"Some 18 months elapsed during construction; the razing of the old buildings on the site was started October 15th, 1928; early in 1929, the foundations, reaching to a depth of 69 feet below Lexington Avenue, were completed and less than a year from the start, September 28, 1929, the last of the steel was set. Tenants were in the building on April 1st, 1930. The building occupies a plot of 37,555 square feet and it has a volume of 14,300,000 cubic feet, with over 1,000,000 square feet of floor space. For the first four stories, the building covers the site and above this, east and west, it is penetrated by deep courts extending to the face of the tower. On the side streets, the structure is gradually set back to meet the shaft of the tower.

"Located at 42nd Street and Lexington Avenue, a point of high business concentration, the approach to and communication within this structure, the area of which means such a large resident and transient population, called for liberal planning of approaches. There are three broad entrance lobbies, each with two revolving doors and center hinged doors. These lead from the centers of the front on 42nd Street, Lexington Avenue and 43rd Street directly into a main concourse in the form of a right angle triangle. Along the broad base of this triangle, there are four elevator lobbies

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
__PREHISTORIC	__ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	__COMMUNITY PLANNING	__LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	__RELIGION
__1400-1499	__ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	__CONSERVATION	__LAW	__SCIENCE
__1500-1599	__AGRICULTURE	__ECONOMICS	__LITERATURE	X SCULPTURE
__1600-1699	X ARCHITECTURE	__EDUCATION	__MILITARY	__SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
__1700-1799	X ART	__ENGINEERING	__MUSIC	__THEATER
__1800-1899	X COMMERCE	__EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	__PHILOSOPHY	__TRANSPORTATION
XX __1900-	__COMMUNICATIONS	__INDUSTRY	__POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	__OTHER (SPECIFY)
		__INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1928-1930

BUILDER/ARCHITECT William Van Alen (1882-1954)

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Chrysler Building is a monument to America's "machine age"--an era when naive optimism believed the salvation of the world was the machine. Everything from skyscrapers to lamps were supposed to be machine made even if they were not. "Style Moderne," of which Art Deco is actually a subdivision has enjoyed a revival in the last few years and the Chrysler is probably one of the most glorious statements of this period in our architectural history.

The tallest building in the world (1048 feet) for a few months (before the Empire State Building was complete), the Chrysler was taken over by Walter Chrysler from earlier plans for a Reynolds skyscraper. The plans were modified (the tower) and Van Alen's final design was dramatic enough to prompt the contemporary critic Kenneth Murchinson to dub the architect the "Ziegfield of his profession."¹

The critic goes on:

[Chrysler Building] "bespeaks a rich and fertile talent and it represents our modern life, its changing conditions and forces, with more accuracy and clearness than almost anything else in the way of an office building that has lately burst upon the startled vision of the classicists and the columnists.

The Chrysler Building has probably earned more publicity during its short but lurid career than even its own instigators hoped for. And as it is a commercial proposition, embodying the emblazonment of automotive progress, why should the architect have hesitated a moment in being the Ziegfeld of his profession and glorifying American mechanical genius and incidentally, Mr. Chrysler's output of cars and trucks and boats?

The scheme of decoration of this building, inside and out, is based on *movement*. All the motives used in the enhancement of the pictorial side of the structure are in action. On the thirtieth story, the brickwork wheels revolve under a horizontal mudguard of patterned brick. Just above, the Chrysler radiator emblem raises its silvery head; above the emblems, on the thirty-first floor great eagles of shining metal stick their heads out and look down upon the ceaseless flow of city traffic.

¹ Murchison, Kenneth. The Chrysler Building. American Architect. pp. 24-28

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than 2 acres

UTM REFERENCES

A 18 586500 4511460
ZONE EASTING NORTHING
C

B
ZONE EASTING NORTHING
D

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Bounded by Lexington, 42nd and 43rd. Manhattan tax map, Block 1297, Lot 1. Block bounded by West Lexington Avenue on the West, (200.2 feet) South 42nd Street on the South (167.2 feet), Third Avenue on the east and East 43rd Street on the North (205 feet).

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Carolyn Pitts, Architectural Historian

ORGANIZATION

Historic Sites Survey, National Park Service

DATE

August 1976

STREET & NUMBER

1100 L Street, NW.

TELEPHONE

523-5464

CITY OR TOWN

Washington,

STATE

D. C.

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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to approach the twenty-eight passenger cars, each battery of which serves a different group of floors. Two broad stairways lead from the main concourse to the basement, where there is a subway passage under Lexington Avenue to the subway and the Grand Central Station.

"The main story street frontages are divided into an extensive series of shops and in the basement, opening on the subway passage, there is more space for shops.

"The elevators, consisting of four groups, are so arranged that eight cars serve the first to the twelfth stories, eight more serve the twelfth to twenty-first stories and two groups of six each serve the twenty-fourth to forty-second stories, and forty-second to fifty-fifth stories. In addition, there are service elevators, one of which rises the entire height. There is a fire tower placed directly at the center of the building for its entire height, and two additional stairways grouped between the elevator batteries. The toilet rooms are worked into the lobby spaces between the elevators on those stories where the elevators do not stop and grouped with them in the upper stories. The main shaft of the tower has a net area of some 7,500 square feet and its outside dimensions are 107 feet 6 inches on the Lexington Avenue side and 88 feet 3 inches on the side streets.

"A typical plan of the divided floors has corridors leading from either side of the elevator lobbies, so that the distance is short from any of the offices to the elevators. All offices have good outside lighting and there is considerable variation in size of space available from small office areas to large undivided floors.

"The main story entrance is floored with Sienna Travertine and the wall surfaces are of red Moroccan marble with onyx panels behind the light reflectors. The indirect lighting from these vertical panels gives a general diffusion and excellent illumination of the pictorial design of the ceiling, which is a composition which depicts the vision, human energy and engineering ability which made possible the structure. The canvas, which is 100 by 76 feet, is one of the largest ever created. The symbolism of the design is naturally developed from primitive forces to the elements of building construction and finally to the highly specialized modern methods. One band of the composition shows the development of modern transportation. The artist, Mr. Edward Trumbull, has developed the theme with rich color, to which the highly decorative marble work of the interior walls is a suitable setting.

"In the upper stories of the building, the finishing of the corridors and offices is substantial but utilitarian. The main corridors are terrazzo floored, with rubber tile in secondary corridors. Division partitions throughout in offices are of glass and steel, with a grained walnut finish. The radiators are of copper and are concealed in window cabinets.

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"The Chrysler Building, New York City, was designed by William Van Alen and erected by Fred T. Ley & Company, Inc. The electrical contractors were Hatzel & Buehler, Inc. The murals and decorations in the main hall were executed by Edward Trumbull." ¹

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1. Van Alen, William, Architecture and Building, Vol LXII, No. 8, August 1930, pp. 223-224

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Perhaps, in the futuristic days to come, many a story will be woven about these eagles. They may become as famous as the gargoyles of Notre Dame; they may have rude jokes and whispered innuendoes thrust in their tin ears, just as has happened many a time to the Luckless Lions of the Library!

Mr. William Van Alen, the architect of the Chrysler Building, first turned a lot of people against him by winning the Paris Prize of the Beaux-Arts Institute of Design, way back in 1908. He spent three years in the Atelier Laloux and the Cafe' des Deux Magots, a seat of learning attached to the Ecole des Beaux-Arts by means of both being on the Rue Bonaparte. Van Alen was the only American student who returned from Paris without a box full of architectural books. He foresaw the future. He tingled with the touch of approaching modernism. He threw his pencil compass overboard on the way home.

The building teems with the spirit of modernism, it is the epitome of modern business life, it stands for progress in architecture and in modern building methods. Fred T. Ley and Company, Inc., were the contractors who lifted this gigantic structure from a hole in the ground to a height greater than that of the Eiffel Tower in the short space of sixteen months and put the first tenants in the building some six weeks ahead of schedule.

Indubitably, the Chrysler Building will be surpassed in bulk and height but as the others rise, watch out and see if they exhibit the originality, the sense of action and the spirit of movement that William Van Alen has put in his design."²

Today the "Style Moderne" is the subject of extensive scholarly research--the Chrysler Building remains a great classic of the 1930's and this architectural style.

²Ibid., pp. 29

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American Architect

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Robinson, Cervin, and Bletter, Rose Marie, Skyscraper Style, Oxford University Press, New York, 1975.

Vlack, Don, Art Deco Architecture in New York, Icon, Harper and Row, New York, 1974.